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A Music-Making in the Potteries

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M. Emile Sauret, having accepted an engagement offered him by the Conservatoire of Chicago, will relinquish his position at the Royal Academy of Music at the end of July next. The study of the violin, for which the Academy has been famous since the days of Prosper Sainton, will now be represented chiefly by Messrs. Wessely and Bláha, and the most recent addition to the Professoriate, Mr. Willy Hess, who is severing his connection with the Conservatoire at Cologne in order to join the staff at Tenterden Street.

Tablets are erected over houses in which great men were born or in which they lived, but at length both fall a prey to time, the all-devourer. The Schwarzschanerhaus, Vienna, in which Beethoven died on March 26, 1827, is already or is about to be pulled down. The same fate awaits another house connected with the master, one at Oberdöbling, in which he composed part of the 'Eroica' symphony. To this house, by-the-way, other memories are attached: it was here that Körner wrote his 'Zriny,' and that the poet Bauernfeld died in 1890.

In a certain Cathedral city in the — of England (after all its exact location mattereth little) is an Ancient Guildhall. Under the portico thereof a correspondent recently took refuge during a heavy storm of rain. In order to lighten the weary moments of waiting he read the Police notices there posted up, one of which ran thus:—

Found in High Street on Friday, the 23rd inst., a choral necklace, with gold clasp. Apply to the Police Station.

Perchance the fair owner of this 'choral necklace' wore a brass band round her waist, thus forming a combination of vocal and instrumental adornment.

A MUSIC-MAKING IN THE POTTERIES.

'No smoke, no money,' is a saying in the Potteries. Therefore it is of no use to anathematize the atmospheric environment of North Staffordshire. Similar conditions characterize Sheffield, Manchester, and Newcastle-on-Tyne; but in all these places, the Potteries included, it is quite certain that any effort in the direction of fine choral achievement does not end in smoke. In visiting these grime-enviored industrial centres, one cannot fail to be impressed with the strong contrasts produced by the dulness of such surroundings and the magnificence of the voices of the dwellers therein and round about. But may not the musical enthusiasm of these people be attributed, in some measure, to the delightful change which music affords them after their weary hours of toil? The following account of a music-making in the Potteries, with some historical notes, may furnish the answer to this question.

The seed-sowing of the fruitful yield of choral music in the Potteries took place about forty-five years ago. All honour to the man who initiated so splendid a movement for the uplifting of his fellows! His name—Josiah Wolsincroft Powell—should be held in grateful memory. Mr. Powell (1820-1891) was an enthusiastic amateur in music. His occupations were successively Registrar of births and deaths, and Town Clerk of Burslem. He found that the people could not read music. He therefore tried first the Hullah system and afterwards that of Waite (the use of figures), but without success. Then he adopted the Tonic Sol-fa method, with results that far exceeded his expectations. In 1860 and 1861 he brought his choir to the Crystal Palace in competition with others at the Tonic Sol-fa Festivals, and won prizes—the

judges on the second occasion including Goss and Turle. These successes made choral singing a very popular subject, and gave a great impetus to the spread and cultivation of music in the Potteries. Mr. Powell—who, by-the-way, first translated Mendelssohn's 'Elijah' into tonic sol-fa notation—had a worthy colleague in Mr. George Howson; and Mr. H. Goodfellow, with the experience of more than forty years as a choralist, and now chairman of the committee of the North Staffordshire District Choral Society, is alive to tell the tale of those early days of something attempted, something done.

All this pioneer work paved the way for the North Staffordshire Musical Festivals, conducted by the late Dr. Swinnerton Heap, and held in the Victoria Hall, Hanley. The first took place in 1888 (on this occasion Edward Elgar played among the violins in the orchestra), the second in 1890, and the third in 1893. At the fourth (in 1896) Elgar's 'King Olaf' was first performed, and the last (in 1899) witnessed the production of Coleridge-Taylor's 'Death of Minnehaha.' Not a little of the success of these meetings was due to the labours of the chorus-master, Mr. F. Mountford, an enthusiastic local amateur.

Before passing on to the event which has prompted this article, it is only fair to mention the good work of others in the district. For instance the Burslem Tonic Sol-fa Choir, conducted for many years by the late Mr. J. W. Powell, and subsequently by Mr. W. Docksey (now of Bradford); the North Staffordshire Philharmonic Society, conducted by the late Dr. Swinnerton Heap until his death; and the Hanley Philharmonic Society, Mr. Fred Mountford conductor. These Societies all did excellent work in the district for a number of years, as did also the Newcastle-under-Lyne Philharmonic Society. But they have all ceased to exist, and for a season or two—in fact, until the initiation of the North Staffordshire District Choral Society—the Potteries district was practically served by the Hanley Glee and Madrigal Society, an organization which has done and is doing excellent work under the able conductorship of Mr. James Garner, who also conducted the premier choir at the Liverpool Eisteddfod in 1900.

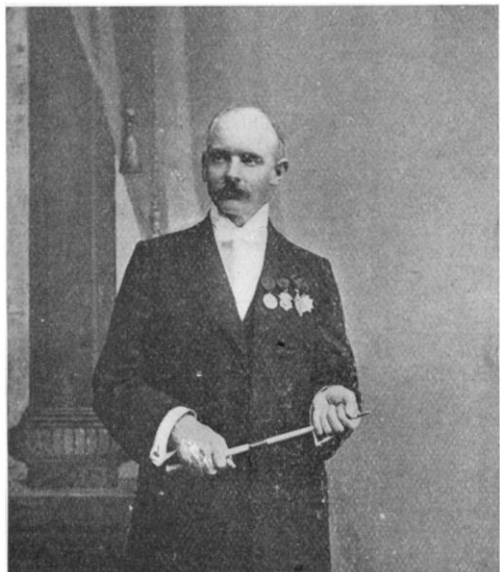
The North Staffordshire District Choral Society was founded in the month of June, 1901, when the Society was organized for the particular purpose of taking part in the Royal National Eisteddfod held at Merthyr Tydvil. It owes its origin to a prize-choir hailing from Talke, a small village in the district, conducted by Mr. J. Whewall. Its members (about 200 in number) are all working folk in the Potteries—the tenors and basses being artisans following the various avocations of the district. The sopranos and altos have also to earn their own living in various occupations. The ladies pay a subscription of one shilling for the season, the gentlemen put down one shilling and sixpence, and all have to find their own music. Two-thirds of the choir sing from the tonic sol-fa notation. The rehearsals are held at Tunstall, as a convenient centre in a group of towns which includes Burslem, Hanley, and Stoke-on-Trent, and the members come from within a radius of five miles. Attendance at rehearsals is regarded as a duty of a very enjoyable nature, and any man who has to work on a 'night shift' experiences a sense of keen disappointment at his compulsory absence.

These Potteries singers appear to be an ambitious folk. In the year 1901 they essayed to beard a certain lion in his den—the lion being Taffy, his den the Principality. In other words, they competed at the National Welsh Eisteddfod, held at Merthyr, and carried off the first prize (£200 and gold-mounted

baton), actually beating all the nine native choirs that competed! A similar victory was gained at the Bangor Eisteddfod in September last, when Mr. Whewall and his forces vanquished all the Welsh choirs in the fray and also the celebrated Blackpool Choir conducted by Mr. Whitaker. With such achievements it is no wonder that the Committee of the Society—a body of hard-working men not lacking in forceful energy, and a zealous Secretary—should desire to add to the laurels already won, by organizing a performance of Dr. Elgar's 'Dream of Gerontius' with the co-operation of the composer as conductor.

This great event took place in the Victoria Hall (Town Hall), Hanley, on the 13th ult. with most gratifying success. The pitiless rain by no means damped the enthusiasm of the performers and the attentive audience that filled the large building. The soloists were Miss Muriel Foster, Mr. John Coates and Mr. Ffrangcon-Davies, the mere mention of whose names is a sufficient guarantee of excellence in their important participation. The orchestra (led

enthusiasm. They sang with heart and voice. No flabbiness, no make believe, but a genuine out-pouring of song. Some choralists fail to open their mouths as they ought to do, and too often regard the conductor as beyond their range of vision; but these Potteries people would tell you 'That's not business.' And then the ease with which they sang music that cannot but be regarded as difficult to the ordinary run of choral societies who are content to go on in the rut of a jog-trot four-in-a-bar unemotionalism! Not a point was missed, and the various entries seemed as though the themes gently floated in upon a sea of music. Intonation, perfect; and the absolute refinement of the whole choir was magnified in the delicate singing of the semi-chorus. This is high praise, but it is fully deserved by these good choralists of the North Staffordshire District Choral Society and their most able conductor, Mr. James Whewall.



MR. JAMES WHEWALL,
CONDUCTOR OF THE NORTH STAFFORDSHIRE DISTRICT
CHORAL SOCIETY.

(Photo by Mr. S. Ellis, Hanley.)

by Mr. Speelman) consisted of forty-five players from the Hallé Band at Manchester, with a good infusion of local players—twenty-six in number, an efficient complement which included six lady violinists, Mr. W. Sherratt, who has held the post of organist of Stoke Parish Church for nearly a quarter of a century, efficiently presided at the organ. The programme, entirely selected from the compositions of Dr. Elgar, consisted of the 'Froissart' Overture, songs from the 'Sea Pictures' Cycle (admirably sung by Miss Muriel Foster and Mr. Ffrangcon Davies), and the choruses 'As torrents in summer' ('King Olaf') and 'It comes from the misty ages' ('The Banner of St. George'). With the exception of the last two—excellently sung under the baton of Mr. James Whewall (at the request of Dr. Elgar), the above-named works were conducted by the composer, who also directed the splendid performance of 'The Dream of Gerontius.'

The honours of the evening were carried off by the chorus, a youthful and exceedingly intelligent body of singers. One could not fail to be struck by their



MR. FRED W. MEIR,
SECRETARY OF THE NORTH STAFFORDSHIRE DISTRICT
CHORAL SOCIETY.

(Photo by Mr. S. Ellis, Hanley.)

In conclusion, we may quote from a letter written by Dr. Elgar, after the performance above noticed, to the Secretary of the Society:—

Will you be good enough to let the members know that I was delighted and, I will add, deeply impressed by their performance. I have rarely heard such finished, musicianly singing, and have never had less trouble to get my exact reading—often a difficulty with one rehearsal; this was made easy for me by the splendid training of Mr. Whewall, and by the alert, attentive, and friendly attitude of the chorus.

The tone was magnificent,—silvery yet solid,—well balanced and sonorous, and the 'attack' fine: the infinitesimal trifles—not shortcomings—which did occur were caused merely by the want of more time in rehearsing with the orchestra. I place the chorus in the highest rank, and I thank the members for giving me the opportunity of hearing a performance of my work almost flawless.

DOTTED CROTCHET.